

Homefield College of Further Education

**Inspection of FEFC-funded provision in
non-sector establishments for students with
learning difficulties and/or disabilities**

November 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to secure provision for individual students in England with learning difficulties and/or disabilities where sector provision is inadequate. When it exercises this duty, the Council makes a contract with the establishment making the provision. The contract includes the right of inspection.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in Council Circulars 97/12 and 97/22. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and other aspects of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 - good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*
- *grade 4 - less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses*

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Summary

Independent Establishment 08/00

Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in the non-sector establishment for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Homefield College, Leicestershire

Inspected November 2000

Homefield College is situated in Sileby, a village near Loughborough, Leicestershire. The college provides full-time residential education for students with learning difficulties, epilepsy, autistic spectrum disorder and hearing impairment. Currently there are 20 students, eight of whom are funded by the FEFC. Four of the FEFC-funded students are under the age of 19 and four are aged over 19.

The college aims to help students learn skills to increase their personal independence. Activities take place in a high-quality learning environment. Students acquire skills in independent living, social and personal development and, where it is appropriate and matches the student's individual needs and aspirations, vocational skills.

The college carried out a review of the curriculum using the inclusive learning quality initiative as the catalyst for change. As a result, the curriculum is now divided into four areas: independent living, vocational learning, basic skills and personal and social development. Staff demonstrate appropriate knowledge, skills and

understanding of the curriculum, which is well-managed.

Initial assessment is used to identify detailed individual learning goals. Individual learning programmes are comprehensive. The programmes identify the skills which students need to learn for their future lives. Students undertake everyday tasks in the college. Most of the teaching is good or outstanding. Students progress towards and achieve their learning goals. Lessons are well-planned and provide for the needs of the individual. Teachers use varied and effective methods to improve students' learning. Arrangements for recording students' progress are good. Tutorials are effective and students are supported by good use of formal and informal meetings. The college has appropriately qualified and well-trained staff. Senior managers provide strong leadership and effective support for staff.

There are no formal arrangements to systematically review and evaluate policies and procedures. The college's development plan is at an early stage of development.

The self-assessment report is comprehensive and all staff contributed to the process. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. There is a detailed action plan and since the self-assessment report was written significant progress has been made to address the weaknesses. Inspectors identified strengths in the management

Summary

of the college that had not been included in the report. This strength has had a significant impact on students' learning.

The work funded by the FEFC was judged to be outstanding, with many strengths and few weaknesses, and was awarded a grade 1.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 Homefield College is situated in Sileby, a village near Loughborough, Leicestershire. The college provides full-time residential education for students with learning difficulties, epilepsy, autistic spectrum disorder and hearing impairment. The college is run as a private company. Ownership has been continuous since 1987. The principal and head of education are the only directors of the company. The college's mission is to 'empower its students to achieve maximum personal independence through the provision of a high-quality learning environment which enables them to acquire the independent living, social, personal and where appropriate vocational skills which match their individual needs and expectations'. The college provides full-time residential education for students with learning difficulties, epilepsy, autistic spectrum disorder and hearing impairment. The college has 6 teaching staff and 20 support staff and draws no clear distinction between teaching and non-teaching staff.

2 Of the students that are resident, 17 live in the main college site and three in a nearby house. Students are aged between 16 and 21 years. Eight students are funded by the FEFC. The college does not cater for students with physical disabilities or profound and multiple learning difficulties.

3 Individual learning programmes, based on students' needs,

are developed from a comprehensive curriculum framework. At the centre of the curriculum is the teaching of basic skills, domestic skills, personal care and personal and social development. Teaching emphasises the need for students to learn the skills they will need in their future lives, rather than on gaining external accreditation. Where necessary, the college provides vocational learning opportunities within and outside the college. Opportunities exist for students to attend courses at local further education colleges.

4 Specific leisure activities are arranged in the college on a Tuesday evening and students have opportunities to follow a range of sporting and social activities in the community. For example, students go to an evening disco in Leicester once a month. Many students return home for weekends at some stage during term time.

The inspection

5 The inspection was carried out over three days by two inspectors. Sixteen sessions were observed. Inspectors' judgements were informed by meetings and discussions with senior managers, staff and students. College documentation, students' work and students' files were examined. Inspectors visited students' living accommodation and a visit was made to the village shop owned by the college.

Context

6 The self-assessment report is comprehensive. All staff contributed to the process. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Since the self-assessment report was written significant progress has been made to address the weaknesses identified in a detailed action plan. Inspectors identified responsive management as a further strength that had not been included in the self-assessment report.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of lessons observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	9	6	1	0	0

7 The initial assessment process is comprehensive and directly linked to learning in the four main curriculum areas of independent living, vocational learning, basic skills and personal and social development. Inspectors agreed with the college that this is a strength. Recruitment of students is carried out carefully. Senior college managers visit the home area of every prospective student. Students are observed in their schools. Information is gathered from a wide range of professionals. The views of students and parents are taken into account. Considerable thought is given to the needs of prospective students, and of those who are already placed in the college, to ensure that a balance is achieved in the different kinds of learning which they experience.

8 Careful judgements are made about the detail of the individual assessments needed during the first few weeks the students are at the college. Assessment is differentiated to match the students' individual needs and abilities. Good use is made of resources to which students can relate such as newspaper articles and magazines. All staff at the college are involved in the initial assessment of students.

9 Inspectors agreed with the college that a strength is the clear link made between initial assessment and the

identification of individual learning goals. Student profiles based on the outcomes of initial assessment include factors that affect learning, learning style, relevant information, current level of skills, and primary learning goals. Where appropriate, individual behaviour plans are established and used. Links between student profiles and student behaviour plans are good.

10 A major strength identified by the college, and acknowledged by the inspectors, is the detailed and productive individual learning programmes. Each learning plan helps students to learn the skills they will need in their future lives through undertaking everyday tasks in the college. For example, students learn to devise menu plans, shop for food and prepare and eat three main meals and five or more snack meals a week. This enables them to develop basic skills through meaningful and relevant activities. All students have the opportunity to experience a range of vocational options. They include cookery, home maintenance, office procedure, horticulture and working in the colleges' shop in the local village. Additional vocational options include animal care at a local animal sanctuary, and woodwork and construction in a local college. Careful thought is given to the appropriateness of the vocational option to the students' needs. Some

The Curriculum

students can follow appropriate options at a variety of levels of competency. For example, horticulture can be studied at one level in the college or at a different level by attending courses at a local land-based college. Good use is made of community facilities to help students learn the skills they will need on leaving the college. Students shop for items they use in meal preparation, and for toiletries and other items, which they use during the week. Students learn to use public transport to travel to the local colleges where they take part in both vocational and recreational programmes. Many students learn to use the train and are then able to travel home for weekends and holidays.

11 Teaching is outstanding. This strength is understated in the self-assessment report. Sessions are effectively planned to meet the identified learning goals of each student. Session plans highlight specific goals relating to students' personal development and basic skills. The majority of students understand what they are learning and why they are learning it. Staff have realistic expectations of each student's learning. Students with complex needs and /or behavioural difficulties find it difficult to concentrate for a whole session. Staff work hard to ensure that these students are involved throughout the lesson by using a range of effective teaching methods. For example, one session required a change of activity three times within thirty minutes to maintain students' interest and to consolidate their learning. In other sessions, the needs of students with communication difficulties were taken

into account by allowing them an appropriate amount of time to respond effectively.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is good recording of students' progress and that students are achieving their learning goals. All staff who have contact with students have copies of the student profiles and report progress on students' learning goals in each of the four curriculum themes. Staff produce progress reports and learning goals are reviewed at intervals to match learning needs. Learning goals are set at achievable levels that are challenging. In some cases, the students' pace of learning is rapid. This encourages students to learn and, as a consequence, they are motivated to learn more. From evidence supplied, inspectors determined significant improvement in students' self confidence.

13 Transition planning is carefully managed and the college takes steps to ensure the welfare of students when they leave the college. There is an effective relationship with the local careers service and the careers adviser provides a careers education and guidance programme for students. The college works hard to develop strong links with relevant agencies in the students' home regions. Some students stay within the area and, in one case, the student's family moved to Leicestershire rather than the student moving back to them.

14 There is good management of the college curriculum which encompasses work undertaken during the day, evening

The Curriculum

and weekends. The college has effectively used the concept of inclusive learning in planning its curriculum. Staff demonstrate appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding of the curriculum and use every opportunity to help students to learn.

Other Aspects of Provision

15 The senior management team of the principal, head of education and co-ordinator of education, provide strong leadership and effective support for staff. There are six teaching staff and 20, mainly part-time, support staff who cover all aspects of the 24-hour curriculum. Staff are deployed effectively across the college. No clear distinction is drawn between teaching and non-teaching staff in the importance of the part they play in helping students to learn. All staff are expected to support the learning, progress and achievement of all students. Senior managers shape policy and strategic development and also help students in their learning programmes. A major strength, not identified in the self-assessment report, is the responsiveness of senior managers. The management ethos is one of collaboration and partnership with college staff. This encourages a whole staff team approach to the management of the college and the supported learning of students. Staff are consulted and have opportunities to contribute to the running of the college. A range of formal and informal meetings enables staff to share information and to undertake joint planning. Staff confirm that discussions focus on the progress of individual students and the strategies that have enabled them to learn.

16 Staff have a clear understanding of the mission of the college and are given details of students' individual learning plans. Additionally, all staff are given copies of the behavioural plans relating to students and this helps to develop a consistency of approach in their dealings with students. This information is provided to all staff who

work in the college, regardless of whether they are teaching or non-teaching staff. For example, the college secretary and her part-time assistant are aware of the learning needs of the students and how to manage student behaviour.

17 The tutorial system is effective. Individual tutorials are held regularly and staff concentrate on the progress students make in all aspects of their individual learning plan. This is discussed in detail with the student and careful consideration is given to successes achieved and to how the student can address issues of concern. Personal and support tutors produce weekly records. Information on students is gathered from all staff as a basis for tutorials.

18 College staff are committed to helping students achieve and are appropriately trained and positive about the direction the college has taken over the last three years. There is a comprehensive induction programme for all new staff. All staff have job descriptions and contracts are reviewed to reflect new duties and responsibilities. Annual appraisal is effective and staff are observed at least three times a year. All staff receive adequate training as identified through appraisal and observations.

19 The college has comprehensive policies and documentation. However, the policies do not specify dates for review and there are no implementation procedures. There are no college systems to monitor the effectiveness of college systems and procedures in order to

Other Aspects of Provision

inform future planning. The college has not produced a strategic or development plan. These weaknesses are identified in the self-assessment report.

Conclusions

20 Key strengths

- comprehensive initial assessment
- clear links between initial assessment and individual learning goals
- outstanding teaching and learning
- good recording of students' progress
- students' good achievements
- effective tutorial support
- committed and well-trained staff
- good management of the curriculum
- responsive management.

21 Weaknesses

- lack of arrangements to systematically review and evaluate policies and procedures.

The work funded by the FEFC was judged to be outstanding, with many strengths and few weaknesses, and was awarded a grade 1.